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### Auto ethnography

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# **Autoethnography: A methodology to integrate professional and academic learning in journalism education**

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## **Abstract**

This paper explores how a professional doctorate, the Doctor of Professional Studies in Public Works at Middlesex University, was successfully completed using autoethnography as its methodology. It aims to illustrate to journalism educators the suitability of using this approach to undertake their own research, perhaps at doctoral level, as well as provide to students on journalism programmes with a methodology, that while sometimes contested in the academy, is a credible and rigorous approach that can be meaningfully adopted in a practice-based field such as journalism education.

## **Introduction**

The Doctor of Professional Studies in Public Works (DProf) requires that candidates compile a context statement (hereafter referred to as the research project) which is a critical examination of works which they have created in their professional lives and which exist in the public domain. In my case, my public works consisted of four undergraduate journalism degrees programmes in which I led the conceptualisation, design and implementation over the last 15 years.

This research project identified the opportunities and challenges inherent in creating, validating and running the journalism programmes where I was programme leader. The research project explored underpinning principles in the design and operation of journalism education, that is, how universities

need to create degrees that teach practice-based skills but which, as Gregorian (cited in Connell) suggests, 'are [places] where students would acquire not only skills but the intellectual depth and curiosity and the commitment to honesty and high ethical standards they will need to uphold the core values of this vital profession' (2008, p.2).

The capabilities referred to by Gregorian (ibid) feature strongly among the key themes explored in this research project: degree design that balances theory with practice; the collaboration and comprise inherent in the process of designing and implementing journalism degree programmes; responsibility in ensuring sustainable and enhanced learning experiences. Underpinning all of these is my leadership role in each of them because in essence the research project was a critical reflection of my own professional development with insights into my transition into the academy and how my teaching and research skills evolved.

### **Adopting a reflective approach in research**

Reflective practice, which lies at the heart of autoethnography, is a much-used term in professional life – most professions are conscious of the need for practitioners to reflect on their practice with the goal that performance, however it is defined, is improved. I subscribe to the concept proffered by the educational theorist Friere that to understand how we move forward we need to 're-cognise' (2014, p. 38) the past, taking it apart to enable us to understand, to cognise and know better 'why I do what I do'. Exploring and positioning myself and my experience in the context of my public works was hugely challenging but was aided by my growing confidence in autoethnography as an appropriate and valid methodology.

I was guided toward autoethnography by my research supervisor, in the main because the self-reflective critique required to complete the professional doctoral programme has advocated this as an acceptable, even desirable, and valid approach around which my work could be framed.

A key challenge in writing up the research was, for me, the very personal narrative that it necessitated I adopt, and which it encourages and allows. It took a significant amount of time, and trial and error in seeking an appropriate methodology, before I settled on autoethnography. Finding a methodological approach that enabled me to meaningfully articulate my work was enlightening. It was new to me but it has opened up to research opportunities beyond what I believed to be credible and acceptable within the academy. Taking an autoethnographical approach facilitated the reflective work I was required to undertake.

Underpinning the decision to undertake the process of the professional doctorate was the requirement I had of it that it would inform my practice. As such it was a journey of discovery into how my past practice can re-define my future and the transformative nature of the reflection was both challenging and enlightening. In essence, its reflexive nature needed to have a proactive outcome. It needed to impact on future practice in degree development in journalism education, particularly within my own university.

As Johns states:

‘Reflective practice is about becoming aware of our own assumptions, how these assumptions govern our practice, how these assumptions must shift to embrace change, understanding resistance to assumption shift, and finally to change assumptions to support a better state of affairs.’ (2013, p. xv)

Reflection enabled me to see that I had begun the journey of writing this series of degree programmes based on beliefs and practices grounded in my own experience of studying journalism at university, as well as seeking advice and suggestions from others on how the programmes should be designed. Reflecting on it now, I realise how I often changed my perspective. Like many who are making such decisions, sometimes I went with my instinct, other times I went with what the HE sector appeared to be indicating was right and sometimes it felt that we were in a constant cycle of responding to shifting demands in the industry. In the midst of all of this activity there was rarely a

chance to draw breath and to fully consider, and comprehend, the basis upon which decisions were being made other than a need, an expectation, to keep moving forward.

Schon (1996) puts it quite succinctly when he defines reflection as 'an act of professional artistry' and discusses how 'reflection-in-action (ibid, p.12)' can have a profound impact on behaviours and practice. In the initial phase of compiling the research project, my public works were, to all intents and purposes, historical documents that had undergone amendment. As I progressed through the doctoral project, I led the re-design of the programmes, as such the 2016 degree was framed, in part, as a result of the deep reflection I was undertaking as part of writing the context statement and is reflective of the changes I have undergone as part of that process. Autoethnography requires honesty for it to be valid and I needed to reflect that I had rarely had the chance to reflect as deeply on my work as the DProf experience allowed me to do. It was a revelation.

This recognition of my learning within the context as a programme leader in journalism education has prompted me, as Smith (2011) asserts, to increasingly use critical reflection as a useful way to become more insightful in terms of my own practice and professionalism as well as gain more knowledge about the way in which the broader field of journalism education and its study, aligns itself to meet demands around learning, teaching and research.

Successfully completing the DProf required a decision on how best to present the reflective critique of the public works using a methodology that would be viewed as valid and credible within the setting of the academy with its national regulatory criteria for assessing and awarding doctorates which are fundamentally research degrees. As such, this paper looks at some of the challenges of how to 'tell' a story of a journey and derive meaning from that for my, and hopefully others', future practice, and to research it as one would any area of knowledge. A doctorate by public works is like a reversal into the research and development articulation of a doctoral award. The works have

been achieved and are already in the world. What sits behind their production is doctoral level thinking combined with senior professional practice expertise. It is an examination and articulation of the context and the how and why which provide the missing piece required for the award.

Therefore, I needed a research methodology that could help me to make sense of how the reflection on my public works had evolved to meet the expected demands and conventions as a piece of doctoral work. It required me to consider research approaches within the academy and, on reflection that process has meant I have persistently constructed and reconstructed my own understanding and knowledge of my public works, my work, and my own approach to learning. Developing this research project also contributed to my reaching a point of understanding about the basis on which my knowledge is both created and claimed.

Murdock (2007) points to the work of Alfred Schutz in the early 1930s who argued that people interact with others and continually build and rebuild their own realities as they respond to the changing circumstances of their lives and the society around them. Murdock (ibid) identifies a constructionist approach to which I can relate in the context of my public works in both how I created them and in how I presented them as a key part of the doctoral project.

What was key from the outset was the need to understand the conceptual framework around which the research was created. From an ontological perspective my research project exemplifies Cresswell's definition of a constructivist approach where 'individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work (and) develop subjective meanings of their experiences' (2003, p.8). The use of autoethnography as the key methodology, illustrated how I responded to external forces and my own understanding of them to bring meaning to the design, content and operation of the degree programmes that constituted my public works. The nature of the autoethnographical methodology I adopted has enabled me to illustrate the constructivist nature of my approach in a very meaningful way whereby the 'self' is used to show how the public works, and I, as a researcher, responded

to and negotiated with a broader social world. In this context, my public works included my background, my personal and professional experiences and the role and influence of the wider communities that represent the range of stakeholders in journalism degree programme design, implementation and operation.

On examining my epistemological perspective I am naturally drawn to the interpretivist position that portrays the world as 'constructed and interpreted by people – rather than something which exists objectively' (Denscombe, 2010, p.121). The key concept here that I relate to is that of objectivity, as a human being, and a researcher, I believe myself to be part of a social world, or community, I am not separate from it. My understanding of that world is therefore defined by how I construct my own meaning of it, based on my interaction with it and within it, as opposed to being outside of it. Given that my public works were created by my own experiences and inquiries rather than by what quantitative data may have told me was useful, which, to my mind would have been a more positivist and scientific approach, my epistemological stance was an interpretivist one that sat well with an autoethnographic methodology.

## **Methodology**

This paper is a review of literature in the field of autoethnography and how it is adopted within the academy by academics across a diverse range of subject disciplines. By the very nature of the doctoral research project being discussed, this paper is written in that first person, reflective narrative.

As such, I need to acknowledge that it is in itself an autoethnographic piece of work because I am self-reflecting on my experience and considering what I have learned from it to enable me to bring meaning to it so I can share it with others. Denzin (1989) defines research of this nature as autoethnographic research, so this paper can also be defined as a piece of autoethnography.

## **Adopting an autoethnographical approach**

In compiling and presenting my public works, I knew the approach needed to be reflexive and it needed to stem from a qualitative perspective. I gauge the success of my public works by the impacts they have had on the students I have taught (impact statements from graduates of the programme did form part of the broader work of the research project). Being so personally and closely involved in how my works impact and needing to present a piece of research that reflected this made autoethnography a suitable choice and a methodological approach around which I could frame my work.

Ellis (cited in Jones, Adams and Ellis, 2015) describes autoethnography as being a powerful influence in the work and lives of those who adopt it, she states:

‘it is not simply a way of knowing about the world; it has become a way of being in the world, one that requires living consciously, emotionally and reflexively. It asks that we not only examine our lives but also consider how and why we think, act and feel as we do’ (ibid p.10).

This resonated with me because I frequently needed to acknowledge, as the DProf project continued, that my work was an extension of my own personal ambitions and aspirations and, in researching my own outputs, it helped me learn more about my professional self and improve upon it. As Ellis (ibid) states ‘It (autoethnography) asks that we re-think and revise our lives, making conscious decisions about who and how we want to be.’ (ibid, p.10)

Manning and Adams (2015) also support the premise that autoethnography enables us to understand that what we experience cannot be separated from a whole range of social contexts and that ‘people – especially the researcher – make sense of mundane or notable life events and that lessons...learned across the lifespan (Bochner & Ellis)...with the purpose of offering wisdom and guidance to others’ (ibid, p.189).



Defining autoethnography is complex – Ellis and Berger (2002) are quite clear that it is a social science research method which consists of ‘stories written in an autobiographic genre about the relationship of self, other and culture’ (ibid, p.849) and, as such, legitimises the role of the ‘self ‘ within the wider canon of academic research. But even Ellis & Bochner, two of its leading proponents, identify that ‘researchers disagree on the precise definitions of the types of autoethnography’ (2000, p.740).

What they do assert is that autoethnography is comprised:

‘on the research process (graphy), on culture (ethnos) and on self (auto)’ ... and that all autoethnographies exist somewhere along the ‘continuum of these three axes’ (ibid, p.740).

While definitions vary, autoethnography is essentially a merging of the techniques, theories and practices found in ethnography, with those of autobiography and memoir. As Manning and Adams (2015) state, autoethnography ‘foregrounds the researcher’s personal experience (auto) as it is embedded within, and informed by, cultural identities and contexts (ethno) and as it is expressed through writing...or other creative means (graphy).’ (ibid, p.188).

A review of the literature on autoethnography supported the decision to adopt it, but I also recognised that this choice would not be without some issues. Jones (cited in Jones, Adams and Ellis, 2015), discusses the challenges around autoethnography as a methodology, she says:

‘while choosing autoethnography wasn’t a professional risk...telling personal stories in/as research always carries personal, relational and ethical risks ... I knew these risks were necessary not only for our research but also for living full lives

and changing our world in important and essential ways' (ibid, p.19).

It was clear that I needed this critical engagement with my public works to inform my own future practice and, hopefully, that of others. Exploring my own experience was, therefore, a necessity because it provided a stronger foundation for transparent, reliable and relevant actions.

Jones, Adams and Ellis (2015) point out there is a marked difference between autoethnographic writing and autobiographic writing. As a former journalist my instinct, indeed what I was taught never to do as a journalist, was to write in any way that could be considered autobiographical.

Professionally I was immersed in a culture where the word 'I' was not welcomed in copy, where my experience was not relevant to the story and where the journalist should never be the story. More than that, it is about the need to retain objectivity because it is perceived as core to what journalism should be. However, adopting a constructionist approach as an academic researcher, I acknowledge that objectivity is difficult to attain because we are the product of all of the experiences life throws at us and this shapes the language we use, and the questions we ask. I needed to make the transition to having subjectivity at the heart of my research and feel comfortable with it against long held professional instincts. But autoethnography is nothing if not disruptive and from this disruption I learned much.

Like many journalism educators, I teach students the importance of objectivity in their journalism and acknowledge and am aware of the challenges of this. Similarly in the context of the autoethnographic approach, I acknowledge the challenge it presented but it was the most useful approach to enable me to acknowledge and critically analyse the impact my own subjectivity and value judgements have played in the creation of the range of programmes that comprise my public works. As Le Roux (2017) states the use of the 'self' in the narrative of a piece of academic research is challenging despite the fact

that 'the approach is defensible, the findings...credible and the narrative contributed to the discourse...in academe' (ibid, p.201).

The autoethnographic approach afforded me the opportunity to reflect on much, for example, how I have challenged the accepted norm that we needed to adopt an industry-centred model of education or that industry professionals could almost 'dictate' what we did. From the outset of designing the very first degree, I knew it needed industry 'buy-in' but I was also determined it would have 'university degree standard' at its core. It necessitated that I consider the contribution of industry partners but, in the end, I designed a degree which put academic standards at its centre. This is not to say that they are mutually exclusive, but the two worlds have different demands and expectations and as journalism educators meeting them is a constant balancing act. Reflecting on my response to the need to meet many competing demands, I realised with hindsight that I felt vulnerable but that this vulnerability did lead to outcomes which I felt satisfied my own professional instincts, as well as the demands of a range of stakeholders in the programme.

As I accepted the practice and process of autoethnography I also needed to be assured of the rigour and validity of it. Pathak (2010) discussed how she devised her own guidelines to ensure rigour in her autoethnographic work and this proved helpful and reassuring. Similarly Forber-Pratt devised a checklist to ensure her autoethnographic work met criteria around the credibility and validity expected in academic research. Adopting a similar approach was both useful and supportive. She stated: 'the beauty of autoethnography is creating your approach yourself and finding your own voice' (Forber-Pratt, 2015, p.832).

As Le Roux (2017) P202 states 'the researcher should be regarded as primarily responsible for ensuring that academic rigour of...her research' – as such responsibility fell to me to ensure that the work achieved this and that the outcome, as with that of any piece of research, became of value to a wider community of practice.

While autoethnography puts the researcher at the heart of the research project, as Ngunjiri, Hernandez & Chang state, this does not mean it is 'self in a vacuum' (2010, p.3). In the context of researching my practice it is clear that I needed to consider and recognise the impact of a multiplicity of others in how I acted and reacted and how this influenced the decisions I made when designing and implementing the programmes. As Hernandez, Sancho, Crues & Montane state:

'it meant paying attention to moments of personal and professional transits such as learning processes, crises, migrations, beginnings and ruptures, new contexts and relations and so forth' (ibid, p.5)

They write about how our re-telling of our experiences are unique to us but they inevitably draw others in and have the potential to show to them a perspective on events they may/will not share.

Denzin (1989) also states that autoethnography is often about life changing events or epiphanies and while I would not categorise my own interrogation of my practice in these terms, I realised that I was exploring, examining and analysing periods of profound professional challenge that demanded I acknowledge my limitations as well as my success in stretching these and in doing so alter my own perception of my self, from both a professional and personal perspective. Much of the autoethnography I read was of a deeply personal and private nature and while I felt I was publicly declaring moments of great professional doubt, from that place of vulnerability I gained useful insight into how my professional practice did evolve and improve as time progressed. If autoethnography is about helping ourselves and other learn, as much of the literature supporting it professes, then the lessons I realised I was learning included how to grow in professional confidence through years of practice and effort, and getting things both right and wrong.

In my desire to assure myself that autoethnography met the criteria of validity and reliability in terms of research conventions, I searched for the 'right' way

to do it. There was no clear cut answer, instead I discovered a myriad of approaches that ranged from vivid accounts of personal crises to systematic representations of data. What became clear was that, as Manning and Adams (2015) state: 'there is no single way to do autoethnography', there are instead many approaches that can be adopted.

However, for all my anxiety around the robustness of autoethnography, Anderson & Glass-Coffin (2015, cited in Jones, Adams and Ellis p.64) state that a positive aspect of autoethnography is 'its methodological openness' while at the same time acknowledging that inherent in the method is the challenge around understanding the need to still gather data in a rigorous way.

Anderson & Glass-Coffin (ibid) discuss the need for those undertaking autoethnography to reflect on how they engage with their field of research and how this engagement enables them to more fully understand and perhaps know themselves. Key here is the concept that reflecting on my experiences has changed my public works, my professional practice and my perception of myself. They cite Richardson who says 'writing is also a way of 'knowing' – a method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it' (1994, p.516). This has been my experience and my perspective on my discipline has been deepened and revised as result of this process, evidenced by my willingness to challenge perceptions of how journalism education should be taught within my own university.

What is clear is that the body of autoethnographic work is extensive and spans the scientific to the creative. What is encouraging in this significant body of work, as detailed by Ngunjiri, Hernandez & Change (2010), is that life in the academy is well documented in autoethnographic research and I found this supportive in terms of identifying the autoethnographic nature/aspect of the doctoral project.

Ngunjiri, Hernandez & Change (ibid) also highlight the elements of self-disclosure and exposure that autoethnographic research can involve. In the context of my own work I needed to acknowledge that the greatest challenge for me was how I, and my work, are perceived in a professional rather than personal context. I am conscious of the need to have readers understand that this had the potential to be limiting in my career as much as it could be liberating. The very nature of the autoethnographic approach demands honesty, with a recognition of both professional and personal vulnerability being a factor in how the work is written and presented.

Pathak (2010) discusses how undertaking autoethnographic research gave her the opportunity to tell stories that she herself wanted to read. She acknowledges the challenges, as she puts it, that telling her own story was a challenge because she wanted it to be 'research and not merely me-search' (2010, p.3). This resonates strongly with me, as I suspect it would with many within the academy who are undertaking research.

Exploring, sharing and analysing my professional experience in this way was by turn terrifying, exciting and liberating. My professional life is bound by 'rules' of systematic methodological approaches to both academic and journalistic research – autoethnography provides an opportunity to be more than autobiographic and less than the academic discourse referred to by Ngunjiri, Hernandez & Chang (2010).

While autoethnography presents an exciting opportunity it also presents a challenging one. As Forber-Pratt states: 'how does one actually do this?' (2015, p.821). I identified strongly with her concerns over the practicalities of presenting research in this way.

Ellis (2009) talks about autoethnography as an approach that does result in the researcher becoming vulnerable in the face of others, and perhaps oneself. This has been my experience, as I realise/reflect that others will read my work and perhaps criticise both my practice and the academic integrity of

the autoethnographic approach I adopted. Manning and Adams (2015) agree there is risk inherent in the honesty that autoethnography requires.

Ngunjiri, Hernandez & Chang (2010) also identify that autoethnographies will often present challenges in terms of ethical dilemmas faced by participants, particularly when sensitive, personal issues are explored and could impact on others. Manning and Adams (2015) refer to this as relational ethics and the consideration that requires to be given to anyone likely to be impacted by what is explored in the research. In terms of my work this relates to any comment I made about the contributions made by others involved the design of the degrees that form my public works, so care did need to be taken around how much was disclosed about other participants in my experiential journey with very minimal comment made about them. I agree with Forber-Pratt (2015) that the prospect is scary but this was necessary to enable benefit to be derived from my doctoral experience.

Autoethnography required that I confront how 'I' met and merged with the requirement to produce academically sound work (Johnston & Strong, 2008). Just as the discipline of journalism education is still continuing to establish itself within an HE context, so too it seems is autoethnography. The literature suggests it needs to solidify its place within the academy as a more widely adopted methodological tool, particularly in humanities and social sciences, and the range of ways in which we understand and contextualise our experiences and understanding of ourselves in a range of social, political, cultural, economic and educational contexts.

Pathak (2010) makes the point that autoethnography is disruptive in the context of traditional academic research and it is not without its pitfalls. For example, care needs to be taken to avoid falling into autobiographic memoir. Pathak also stated: 'autoethnography gives voice to my life in a way that never seems to be articulated in academic writings in which I searched for myself' (ibid, p.2). What I related to most strongly was her recognition that she has been schooled to accept her lack of voice was 'the most legitimate form of knowledge' (ibid, p.2) – and as already discussed, my professional training

had similarly taught me to silence my own voice in my work. For me, autoethnography legitimises my experience and the role of the 'self', of myself, in my work and that exploring it and finding meaning in it and direction from it can be credibly defended as academic research, which has been critically examined and can rightfully take its place in the canon of work in the field.

More than this, Pathak (ibid) passionately argues for the validity of the knowledge gained as a result of an experience is as relevant as intellectual knowledge and is not separate from it. As she stated: 'to know is not merely an abstract, omnipotent, intellectualised process. To know is to engage an experience fully...knowledge then is a vaster, more multi-dimensional realm than we often recognise' (ibid, pp.4-5).

Her position is that intellectual and experiential knowledge are equally valid, which was important to me professionally. So, the more I understood that autoethnography calls for an 'active intellectual voice' (Pathak, ibid, p.8) to assert this credibility, the safer I felt about using it as a means of re-telling experiences to create a space between the author and the story and remain intellectually critical. Manning and Adams (2015) also asserted that 'personal experience becomes valid, viable and vital kind of data from which to make meaning and use in research' (ibid, p.190).

I am attracted by autoethnography because it lays the foundations which enable personal, lived experiences to become part of the world of scholarly research and investigation. In this respect it has come to be viewed as a research method and methodology that has relevance within the academy despite Delamont's assertion that it is 'essentially lazy', lacking in 'analytic outcomes' and 'impossible' to undertake 'ethically' (2007, p.2).

Critics of the autoethnographical approach, such as Delamont assert that autoethnography 'abrogates our duty to go out and collect data' (2007, p.3). I would contest her definition of data as overly narrow and, in my view, it is a mistaken understanding of data. In the context of an autoethnography, the



'data' is the recollection and narrative around the experience. Part of the reflexive processes undertaken as part of my doctoral journey, and as part of everyday life, does illustrate that the data is analysed, assessment was made of the impact

of the degrees I had written in a rigorous fashion and changes are made as identified and required as part of the on-going re-profiling, moderation and re-design of the programmes. In that sense the approach taken as part of my professional responsibility is akin to a more 'scientific' approach to research.

Critics of autoethnography point to the potential of a perceived lack of critical analysis (Delamont 2007) in such work. As a former journalist I can understand why it is contested and I can see where, as Pearce states 'the alleged laziness of autoethnography is levelled against the often overly evocative nature of autoethnography' (2010, p.4). However, the challenge lies in achieving a balance between the 'narrative' and analytical aspects of the work.

That required meaningful analysis of my work and my behaviours to provide the legitimacy that will be expected within the academy as well as to enable me to develop habits of research that can be built upon. So, while I explored the experience, I measured it against the data (my public works) and derived outcomes that can be more widely shared and tested, if required. Decision-making was based around data derived from very formal processes, such as student module evaluation forms, pass rates and progression rates. This provided hard data that identifies what performs well, and that university managers liked the quantitative data that illustrates success in this way.

For my part, I am more interested in the qualitative data – and it was this which also drove the development of aspects of the degree programmes. Feedback comments from students and other stakeholders are of greater use to me. This dual source of feedback informs my decisions around programme and curriculum content and pedagogical approaches and is the basis for action around programme development and change and offers opportunities for active and proactive decision-making.

In seeking to produce academically legitimate work, I was concerned about the credibility and validity of a remembered experience because this forms a large part of autoethnographic work. I had to trust my own recollections and mounds of old paperwork that constituted informal/formal records of how work was progressed. As Ellis & Bochner state 'there is no such thing as an orthodox reliability in autoethnographic research. However, we can do reliability checks' (2000, p.751). Therefore, throughout this process I have analysed documentation, discussed, remembered and reminisced about my experiences with colleagues, students, family and friends to help build trustworthiness in the development of my public works and the impacts these have achieved.

The purpose of undertaking the DProf was to find different – and better – ways of having a positive impact on the design and delivery of the journalism degree within my own university. Wright (2008) asserts observing ourselves and 'telling' the story of that experience does provide a way in which to do make progress in how one does things.

Manning and Adam (2015) provided further support that auto-ethnography was a valid way of undertaking research because, as they state, experience cannot be separated from a range of cultural, social and environmental contexts and in the telling of how this experience has brought meaning 'becomes an acceptable, feasible and indispensable kind of data' that can be researched.

### **Autoethnography to prompt action**

As Ellis & Bochner assert auto-ethnographers are required to look both inward and outward to gain the greatest understanding. They talk about a 'dual identity' (2000, p.74) where the academic and personal selves are working in tandem to reflect on some experience. They say 'the goal is to write meaningfully and evocatively about topics that matter and may make a difference' (ibid, p.748).

Rossing & Scott (2016) talk about the role of playing an insider who also needs to stand back and reflect from a professional perspective. This is not without its challenges because it meant critiquing my own work and decisions, but as Ellis & Bochner (2000) state, autoethnography is about allowing oneself to be vulnerable, they state it is 'the self questioning autoethnography demands is extremely difficult' (ibid, p.738).

What I am clear on is that the 'self questioning' has a purpose. Jones et al (2015) talk about the reciprocal nature of autoethnography and that work of this nature often includes calls to action – indeed my own experience has called me to action to the extent that, in designing an updated degree during the time in which I was undertaking the doctoral programme. As such, I have challenged myself and colleagues to consider the role of journalism education within a university environment and have sought wider discussion about this.

Ellis, (cited in Jones et al 2015) says 'Autoethnography requires that we observe ourselves observing, that we interrogate what we think and believe, and that we challenge our own assumptions' (ibid, p.10). It necessitates that we 're-think and revise' our behaviours and learn from them to achieve a more meaningful outcome or future. Bochner (2015, cited in Jones et al) says 'the burden of the autoethnographer is to make meaning of all the stuff of memory and experience – how it felt then and how it feels now...The past is always open to revision and so too, are our stories of the past and what they mean now (here he is citing Ellis 2009)' (ibid, p.54).

The purpose in undertaking an autoethnographical approach was to enable me to make meaning of my experience and to have confidence that the research was pitched at the appropriate level. Articulating my experience and acknowledging the value of experiential learning at doctoral level was a revelation but it also illustrates it is an approach which has a place in the field of journalism education.

## **Conclusions**

Initially, the autoethnographic approach challenged me, as Stanley who puts it very succinctly when she writes ‘the complexity and conventions of academic writing work, in part, as gatekeeper. If you don’t write like us, you can’t come in’ (2015, p.146). What I have learned from reviewing the wide body of literature on the matter is that there are many ways of presenting my research and that it can still make it a meaningful, useful and legitimate contribution to the discourse around journalism education.

Proponents of autoethnography acknowledge the body of work incorporates ‘quirky, unconventional text’ (Stanley, *ibid*, p.148) that are far removed from the almost stoic nature of academic writing. If I am to view the compilation of the research project as a journey from which I emerged transformed, for me it meant becoming more ‘academic’, and attaining the perceived professional status that will enable me to further develop my own career. What I now realise is that autoethnography, for all it can be disarmingly personal in its content, it does necessitate criticality at its core.

What I have achieved in the process of using auto-ethnography has been ‘me’ using both an academic and a personal voice to analyse, write and reflect on what I have learned from my own practice over a long period of time (Rossing & Scott, 2016).

A benefit of using autoethnography is that it allows personal experience to be shared so as to contribute to the development, either professional or personal, to both the producer of the autoethnography and to others who may benefit from reading it. From my perspective, undertaking autoethnography enable me to examine my own professional strengths and weaknesses at a point in time when I needed to create another new degree programme over a short period of time and I needed to reflect on what I had done well previously. For others it is about presenting a piece of work that documents and analyses a process or an experience in a way that is more useful and meaningful than mere anecdote would be.

My autoethnography provides insights into the 'big' aspects of developing undergraduate degrees in journalism education in my own university as well as the minutiae of what needed to be considered. I would not go as far as to say it is a blueprint, because it is very specific to my own institution, culture and environment, but if I had been able to have read such a document 15 years ago, my journey through the academy would have been much different. In this sense, autoethnography has enabled me to produce relevant and related research for other journalism educators.

Throughout the duration of completing the DProf I moved from having a sceptical view of autoethnography to one where I now believe it can have a very useful place in the field of journalism education. It requires a number of criteria to be considered 'autoethnography' and that list is large, at the basic level it does need to be personal, it does need to be reflexive, it requires an acceptance that experience brings meaning and knowledge to our lives that is not in isolation but is related to our individual environments and experiences and that with careful analysis of how these experiences impact on our lives and practice we can bring meaning to others, in the case of my research, largely from a professional perspective.

The reflexive nature of the analysis does need to be grounded in the underpinning theoretical perspectives that frame the development of journalism education and there does need to be strong evidence that the experience being analysed is supported by artefacts or interviews or observations of practice and behaviour.

Autoethnography could be used for more widely in the field of journalism education to explore a variety of topics, for example, in looking at audience reception of news, journalism students and educators could study themselves as the consumers and/or producers of news to help understand responses or consumption patterns or behaviours. Autoethnography could be used to measure exactly how influential the news media is in election campaigns by exploring its impact on how journalism educators are voting and why. It could be used to assess the impact of the endless stream of health and lifestyle

advice that proliferates in the news media. It provides an opportunity for journalism educators to use their own experiences to reflect more broadly on the role of the news media in society by analysing our own reactions and responses to it. The choice of topics that could be explored from an autoethnographical perspective that could help us more fully understand the news media is, I believe, infinite.

Autoethnography has at its core a sense of transition being made and in my experience of using it, I did indeed move from a place of deep discomfort to one where I would argue that given the right conditions, the right 'story' and using the required rigour, it offers much to the journalism educator who wishes to research and interrogate the field, and their experience of it, in a different way.

Undertaking this reflection on these public works has led me to a place and perspective that challenges some of the accepted norms and practices in journalism education. However, it has also led me to acknowledge that my voice and experience should be heard, as should a myriad of views and experiences, and that while my views may run counter to the prevailing voices, both in my own university and more widely in the academy on journalism education, it is nevertheless grounded in my lived experience, and research, and therefore needs to become part of the shared discourse around the development of the subject area.

Adopting the autoethnographic approach, as I have acknowledged here, was challenging not least because I felt my work may be more critically judged by peers and because I had not adopted a more traditional research method. What autoethnography has been for me has been formative and transformative because it has enabled me to look at my public works in quite a forensic way. It has forced me to consider what drove the decisions I took and how I negotiated various challenges around meeting stakeholder expectations, designing a relevant curriculum and, most importantly, how I will respond to similar challenges in the future.

By its very nature autoethnography is disorienting, especially for a former journalist, but I have learned through the process that my views are also disorienting because they do not present the prevailing views on journalism education within my own team and more broadly in the academy.

Autoethnography forced me to recognise in the context of compiling these public works, and subsequent reflective critique of them, that I drew deeply on the well of my own experience and I came to understand that this is acceptable and credible research at doctoral level. As such, as we advance the discipline of journalism education in the academy we need to draw on a range of voices and understand that merit lies in hearing a multiplicity of views, approaches and experiences.

I see no value in seeking absolute answers to the challenges inherent in developing journalism education programmes to meet the needs of a changing world, what I understand is our need to be more reflexive and fluid in our responses. Similarly, the ways in which we research the field needs to be able to adopt an ecology that lets it come to maturity by acknowledging different approaches.

Ultimately, I gauge the success of the autoethnographic approach in how it has changed me, my perspective, how this will impact on future provision at my university and on the confidence it has given me to believe in this contribution to the body of work around journalism education and that it can be adopted by journalism educators with confidence that it enables the field to be studied in many ways.

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